

with increasing apparent authority as he relied more and more on mathematical formulae, to enunciate laws of seemingly immutable cogency, and existing independent of the circumstances of the form of general social dispensation that surrounded them. It is this assumption that, by their practice as much as by any specific precept, the Webbs expose and destroy. They show, in work after work, that the great mass of the supposed "laws" are laws only in the conventional and not in any scientific sense, that they are, that is to say, associated strictly with Capitalism, and are unrealised deductions from it. Assume, if you can, another background, another general system, and your laws will assume a different shape. For themselves, not only did they reject the 'iron law of wages" they rejected all the "iron laws," and the whole apparatus of fatalism and inexorability by which the orthodox economists had sought to under-jam their structure. Bit by bit, they brought about a great change, not fully recognised, and not credited to them. Their own practice was not to posit some other, and equally rigid background or system of their own. Far from that. They insisted on, and themselves loyally undertook, an interrogation, sustained, careful and disinterested, of all the facts they could lay hands on, of all sorts. They insisted on the admission of, and themselves loyally admitted, varying 'background' hypotheses. By this practice they not only

demonstrated, beyond future oblivion or
obliteration, that
economic science can no more be detached
from the
human beings who are at once its
instruments and its
ends than can medical science. They rendered
another
service to truth, equally significant.
Economic writers,
in the nineteen-thirties, are, on the whole, less
dogmatic
than those of the nineties, enunciate their
'laws' in much
more provisional form, remember *ceteris paribus*,
and accept,
in a word, the view that theirs is a relative
and not an